

Immediate Release

Most of the Hong Kongers are wrong about the healthy consumption of cooking oils, survey finds

First ever specialist health committee established to counter unsubstantiated rumours about cooking oil's effect on health

HONG KONG, 21 November 2018 – Widespread misconceptions and commonly held myths about the negative health impacts of cooking oils have been exposed by an unprecedented public survey, spearheaded by a new board of specialists.

The Cooking Oil and Health Committee is the first independent body of its kind to be established in Hong Kong. It is composed of academics, nutritionists, culinary experts and other specialists, united in a collective bid to correct the widespread misinformation which has infected the public psyche. The committee aims to provide accurate and unbiased facts about cooking oil – countering the prevalence of unsubstantiated belief and commonly believed rumours and promoting a healthy diet.

As part of its research, the COHC conducted an online survey of 1,305 Hongkongers in October, among which 56% of are professionals and white-collar workers. The survey finds that more than half of the respondents had picked the wrong answers and which exposed the extensive level of misinformation present in the general population. Published for the first time today, the results revealed the top three common oil health fallacies:

- The majority of respondents underestimated the recommended daily intake of oil
- The respondents in general misunderstand the facts about different types of cooking oils
- Relatively more respondents believe that country of origin is more important than refining process while choosing the cooking oil

Leading comments on the survey is COHC's Dr Chiu Kwok Pong, a Project Working Committee Member at Food Safety Centre, Subject Specialist of the HKCAAVQ, Royal Society of Chemistry Fellow and a former Senior Chemist at Hong Kong Government's Food and Environmental Hygiene Department.

“This study shows the level of misinformation and myth which is believed by the average person in Hong Kong,” said Dr Chiu. “It is only sensible we start the process of re-educating the public with the truth about cooking oil.

“We founded the Cooking Oil and Health Committee to present scientific fact and unbiased research, to clear up misunderstandings about oil intake, and to provide practical cooking oil-related health tips to the general public.”

To help further the public understanding of cooking oil’s significance in the daily diet, COHC today launched a website dedicated to promoting scientific fact and unbiased research. To promote transparency, it features live Chatbots to answer questions from the public 24 hours a day.

COHC’s Dr Leung Ka Sing, Chartered Chemist and Fellow of the Royal Society of Chemistry as well as Certified Food Scientist of the International Food Science Certification Commission, stressed that the origin of the cooking oil played only one of the roles in the production process.

“What is equally important is the farming, storage, processing and refining technology of raw materials,” said Dr Leung. “When choosing a cooking oil, consumers should look for food safety indicators such as the Hong Kong Q-Mark, ISO9001 or ISO22000 certifications obtained by the manufacturers, issued by accredited certification bodies. Such indicators can increase public’s confidence in the quality of the product.”

However while every cooking oil boasts different properties and nutrients, COHC’s experts stress that the key to optimal health is regularly switching between different oils to enjoy the benefit of multiple nutrients.

The survey, however, shows that only 56% of respondents reported changing cooking oils in the past year.

“It is challenging for the public to gauge the amount of cooking oil consumed based on common misconceptions,” said the committee’s nutritionist Leslie Chan. “The daily recommended intake of cooking oil for an adult is about 5-7 teaspoons. People should regulate the consumption at home accordingly if they dine out most of the time. They might want to consider switching to better quality oils in order to maintain a healthy, balanced diet.”

Chef K K Chan, a culinary expert, said it was important for shoppers to consider the “smoke point” when making a purchase.

“Not all cooking oils are created equal,” said Mr Chan. “The public need to understand the characteristics of each of the cooking oils in the market and decide on the appropriate cooking method – corn oil, peanut oil and canola oil, for example, are best for pan-frying, stir-frying and deep-frying; while extra virgin olive oil is perfect in salad dressings and as a bread dipper.”

For the full survey results and more background on the truth about cooking oils, head to: www.cohc.com (English website to be active next week).

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